DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 909 EA 021 668

AUTHOR	Bowers, Bruce
TITLE	Initiating Change in Schools.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.; National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Apr 90
CONTRACT	OERI-R188062004
NOTE	5p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Sales, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 (free; $2.50 prepaid postage and handling).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Research Roundup; v6 n3 Apr 1990
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Role; *Change Agents; Cooperation; *Educational Change; Elementary Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Styles; *Principals; Program Implementation
IDENTIFIERS	*Institutionalization (of Goals); *School Culture

ABSTRACT

Schools are expected not only to conserve society's values and standards, but to be dynamic organizations with built-in mechanisms for incorporating rapid, far-reaching change. Although change is unlikely unless at least one highly motivated individual assumes the role of initial change agent, lasting change requires more than the efforts of a single person. Pat L. Cox and her colleagues found that change can be successfully implemented within a school only if it has been institutionalized at both the individual and organizational levels. Once an innovation has been initiated, the principal becomes a key player in the change process, as shown in two articles originating from a year-long study of schools where innovations had been initiated at the district level. Shirley M. Hord and Leslie Huling-Austin found that successful program implementation hinged on the principal's actions in four support function areas. Gene E. Hall argues that successful implementation of innovation is also determined by principals' use of an "initiator" leadership style. Roland Vandenberghe's study of educational innovation in Belgian elementary schools corroborates Hall's leadership style thesis and suggests that proposed innovations should be made meaningful to those (primarily teachers) who must expedite the change. Finally, Kent D. Peterson views the school as a culture whose shape and direction can be powerfully influenced by the principal's action or inaction. (MLH)

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VOLUME 6, NUMBER 3
APRIL 1990

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Research ROUNDUP
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Initiating Change in Schools

The public schools are often viewed as conservative institutions, and in the pure sense of the term, they are. It is to the public schools that parents turn for the task of introducing their children to our common culture. The schools respond not only with instruction in the traditional academic disciplines, but also with a myriad of offerings that reflect the depth and diversity of America's history, peoples, and relations with the rest of the world.

On the other hand, schools are expected not only to conserve our values and standards but to be dynamic, reflecting the fact that the world around us is constantly changing. For example, in the wake of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the once alarming challenges from the Soviet Bloc, symbolized in 1957 by the launching of Sputnik, now seem like ancient history. In the area of science, the frontiers of human knowledge are being pushed back daily; and the technology for sorting and storing that knowledge is expanding exponentially.

It seems obvious that public schools must develop a built-in mechanism for incorporating such rapid and far-reaching changes into the curriculum and into the instructional technology which imparts that curriculum. What does the research have to say about the nature of such a mechanism?

Change clearly does take place in schools: experimental programs are incorporated, computer systems are installed, fresh instructional approaches are tested. However, the degree to which such changes take place varies radically from school to school and from district to district. What explains this variation?

The answer is, not surprisingly, that change is not likely to occur unless at least one highly motivated, goal-oriented individual takes on the role of the initial change agent. That individual may be a teacher, a principal, a district curriculum coordinator, or even an involved parent. The answer also includes the proposition, however, that lasting change requires more than the efforts of a single individual.

Pat L. Cox and her colleagues found that change can be successfully implemented within a school only if the change has been institutionalized at both the individual and the organizational levels. That is, not only must an innovation be well established within a particular classroom, but it must also have behind it a supportive organizational infrastructure within both the school and the district. The Lone Ranger classroom teacher who carries on in spite of the central office may make good T.V. fare, but in the real world the key word is *collaboration*.

Thus once an innovation has been initiated, the school's leader, the principal, necessarily becomes a key player in the change process. This is made clear in two articles that derive their conclusions from a year-long study of nine schools where the innovations had been initiated at the district level. Shirley M. Hord and Leslie Huling-Austin found that the relative success of implementation of an innovative program hinged upon the principal taking action in each of four support function areas: (1) developing supportive organizational arrangements, (2) giving inservice training, (3) providing consultation and reinforcement, and (4) performing monitoring and evaluation functions.

Approaching the same data from a different angle, Gene E. Hall argues that successful implementation of innovation is also determined by the principal's leadership style. Among the nine schools under investigation, Hall identified three significantly different styles: the initiator, the manager, and the responder. Those principals employing the initiator style were most successful in implementing change, but, in keeping with the conclusions of Cox and others, that success was also contingent upon the collabo-

ration of many supporting actors.

Roland Vandenberghe's contribution is twofold. First, his study of educational innovation among elementary schools in Belgium provides a cross-cultural confirmation of Hall's thesis regarding the relative effectiveness of different leadership styles. Second, Vandenberghe suggests that the critical feature of all efforts to promote change is that the proposed innovation be made meaningful to those (primarily teachers) who must, in the final analysis, expedite the change.

Finally, Kent D. Peterson, adopting a more sociological perspective, reminds us that the school itself is a culture, an entity whose shape and direction can be powerfully influenced by the action, or inaction, of the principal. He outlines several ways in which the principal can inject into the climate of the school an atmosphere and orientation that encourage change.

Institutions can only be as responsive to their environment as those who operate them wish them to be. As these contributions collectively suggest, initiating change in schools is a challenge not only to the creative dynamism of individuals, but also to the collaborative spirit of all those charged with the formal responsibility of educating our nation's children.

This issue was written by Bruce Bowers, Ph.D., research analyst and writer, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon.

(1) Cox, Pat L.; Lindsay C. French; and Susan Loucks-Horsley. **Getting the Principal off the Hotseat: Configuring Leadership and Support for School Improvement**. Andover, MA: Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands. July 1987. 38 pages. ED 290 231.

What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for ensuring that educational change, once initiated, will be maintained? This is the question addressed by Cox and others in their reanalysis of data from two major school improvement studies conducted by the NETWORK, Inc.: (1) a study of the dissemination efforts supporting school improvement, and (2) a study of the role of teacher incentives and rewards in implementing a technological innovation. These two studies provided extensive field data from a total of eighteen school sites where various innovations had been initiated. Analysis of the data revealed that the institutionalization of an innovation must take place along two dimensions: individual and organizational.

The individual dimension includes the degree to which the innovative program has been made part of the curriculum, in classrooms. If teachers are using the program at a routine level or higher, if they are using the components of the program in an acceptable manner, and if they exhibit relatively low anxiety about the usefulness or manageability of the program, then that program is viewed as being institutionalized at the individual level.

The organizational dimension includes the establishment, at the school and district levels, of structures and routines supporting the innovation. Examples include the assignment of new roles and responsibilities, the involvement of a "critical mass" of teachers, having a line-item for the program in the budget, and routinely training new or reassigned teachers in conducting the program.

Institutionalization along either dimension alone is not sufficient to sustain the innovative program. It must have the enthusiastic support of teachers and it must be reinforced by an infrastructure at the building level and have a measure of support by the district office.

A related finding was that the locus of the initiation of the innovation may also be influential in its eventual success. Four of the five most successfully implemented programs were initiated by the district office, whereas only six of the thirteen less successfully implemented programs, were initiated at that level. This finding suggests that an innovation has a significantly better chance of succeeding when the district itself is involved from the outset.

(2) Hord, Shirley M., and Leslie Huling-Austin. **Effective Curriculum Implementation: Some Promising New Insights**. *The Elementary School Journal* 87,1 (September 1986): 97-115. EJ 342 952.

In 1980 researchers at the University of Texas at Austin carried out a year-long Principal-Teacher Interaction (PTI) study that focused on nine elementary schools from three districts, each from a different state. Its goal was to describe and quantify the interventions—made by principals and other change agents—that facilitated the implementation of educational innovations. In all nine schools the innovations had been initiated by the district; therefore,

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This publication was prepared by the Clearinghouse with funding from OERI, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. OERI-R-188062004. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NAESP or the Department of Education. No federal funds were used in the printing of this publication.

ERIC **Clearinghouse on Educational Management**, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate St., Eugene, Oregon 97403.

variation in the degree of implementation was a function of what took place at the building level.

Success of implementation was measured in terms of three variables: (1) level of use of the innovation, ranging from none to routine to varying degrees of more refined; (2) innovation configuration, the characterization of which was based upon a configuration component checklist devised specifically for the study; and (3) stages of concern, derived from a questionnaire that identifies teacher concerns along a spectrum from self-concern to concern about the program's impact on students.

Using measures from these variables as criteria, the researchers were able to isolate the types of interventions that seemed most successful. Four categories of interventions were seen as critical: (1) developing such supportive organizational arrangements as ordering appropriate materials, hiring or relocating personnel, and organizing schedules; (2) providing inservice or other forms of training; (3) offering teachers individualized, ongoing consultation and assistance, including reinforcement; and (4) monitoring and evaluating teacher performance with the program at regular intervals.

A further finding of the study was that, while principals represent potentially the most critical change facilitator, they clearly cannot "do it alone." In every school where successful implementation was carried out, there were additional change agents who intervened in important ways. These included assistant principals, school-based resource teachers, teacher specialists, district curriculum coordinators, and outside consultants. Depending upon the leadership style of the principal (see the following entry), these additional personnel played a greater or lesser role in the overall implementation of the innovation.

(3) Hall, Gene E. **The Principal as Leader of the Change Facilitating Team**. *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 22,1 (Fall 1988): 49-59. EJ 389 921.

Taking a different approach to the data from the PTI study (see preceding entry), Hall provides additional insight into the factors associated with successful implementation of educational innovations. Although acknowledging that successful change requires the collaborative efforts of many staff, Hall asserts that the principal's leadership style may be the single most important variable.

Hall identifies three "change-facilitator" styles adopted by principals in the PTI study: initiators, responders, and managers. Initiators "have clear, decisive, long-range policies that transcend but include implementation of the current innovation." They tend to operate with a consistent vision of the school's educational mission and to place high expectations on students, staff, and themselves.

Responders, on the other hand, "place heavy emphasis on allowing teachers and others the opportunity to take the lead." They focus on traditional administrative tasks and rely heavily on other change agents to initiate and carry out educational change.

Managers fall somewhere between initiators and responders; "they demonstrate both responsive behaviors in answer to situations or people, and they also initiate actions in support of change effort." They tend to be protective of teachers against demands on their time and energy, and they will work overtime themselves to assist teachers in the implementation of an innovation.

Hall found that initiator-style principals oversaw the most successfully implemented innovations, that managers were the next most effective change facilitators, and that responders presided over the least successfully implemented programs. Why were initiators so much more successful? The answer isn't that they initiated a greater number of interventions (managers actually won out here). Rather, the answer seems to be found in their superior ability to create a dynamic team of change agents who together function in a collegial and directed manner. Whether those agents are providing resources and training, engaged in technical coaching and monitoring, or reinforcing and following up on the innovation efforts of teachers, the image that emerges in schools with initiator-style principals is that of "a high energy, busy, task-oriented, teaching, and learning-oriented, can-do place."

(4) Vandenberghe, Roland. **The Principal as Maker of a Local Innovation Policy: Linking Research to Practice**. *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 22,1 (Fall 1988): 69-79. EJ 389 923.

In 1973 an educational innovation project known as the Renewed Primary School (R.P.S.) project was initiated at the national level in Belgium. It consisted of a number of different but interrelated innovations that were presented to primary schools across the country for voluntary adoption. The number of participating schools increased from nine in 1973 to 275 in 1985. Vandenberghe used data obtained during the 1981-82 school year from 101 teachers in 24 R.P.S. schools as the basis for his conclusions about educational innovation at the local level.

Vandenberghe's findings corroborate those from the P.T.I. study carried out by the researchers from the University of Texas at Austin. Where the school principal exhibited a style that emphasized long-term planning, frequent interaction with teachers, and clear organizational support, the innovations were implemented significantly more successfully than at those schools where the principals sought to avoid risks or where they deferred constantly to change facilitators outside the school for guidance.

Vandenberghe's study provides powerful cross-cultural confirmation of the thesis that the particular leadership style exhibited by the school principal may be the critical factor in whether the implementation of educational innovation is successful. Yet Vandenberghe cautions against attempting to isolate the specific behaviors or interventions that may comprise a successful style. It is not the particular actions of the change agent that count so much, he says, as the effect that those actions have upon teachers implementing the change.

Vandenberghe suggests that perhaps the essential feature of any style leading to successful implementation of change is that it gives meaning to that change. Teachers, suggests Vandenberghe, are reluctant learners. As busy adults, they are often less able than their own students to concentrate on learning something new. Yet that is precisely what the implementation of innovative programs requires of teachers. Unless principals put forth an extra effort to make that innovation meaningful to teachers—by relating it to an overall vision for the school and by constantly reinforcing that vision through frequent interactions with teachers—then the motivation to implement the innovation may quickly evaporate.

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(5) Peterson, Kent D. **Mechanisms of Culture Building and Principals' Work**. *Education and Urban Society* 20,3 (May 1988): 250-61. EJ 372 911.

From a sociological perspective, school principals can be viewed as potential builders and shapers of a culture. At their disposal are a number of ways by which they can influence a school's norms, beliefs, and values. If they are interested in fostering change, principals can do much more than simply focus attention on specific proposed innovations. Their role as change agents begins much earlier, in the establishment of a culture that will receive suggestions for change kindly.

What sorts of actions may principals take to promote such a culture within their schools? Peterson suggests that their greatest influence may be seen in their singular power to recruit, select, promote, and demote staff members. Research indicates that "principals who have strong, effective cultures often spend years recruiting and shaping their faculties." By hiring and retaining teachers who place a high value upon experimentation in the classroom, principals are thereby creating an atmosphere that will be conducive to specific, proposed innovations.

Principals may also shape their cultures by keeping abreast of specific curricular innovations and promoting school inservice programs or ongoing seminars that sensitize staff to the value of such innovations. Furthermore, principals have ways of rewarding teachers' independent efforts to implement innovations by, for example, selecting them for coveted assignments or helping them to get their projects funded. Finally, by simply being "where the action is," principals have myriad opportunities to shape the culture of their schools. What they attend to, talk about, and reinforce during regular tours of the building, or when they are present at school activities, will markedly influence the attitudes and behavior of teachers.

The shaping of a school's culture is the accumulation of hundreds of actions, no single one of which could be viewed as critical. Yet, in combination, they exert a powerful effect on the school's climate for change. As Peterson concludes, "schools with cultures that value professionalism, productivity, and experimentation could become exemplary demonstration schools of new practices, becoming champions of new approaches to teaching and learning."

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Research Roundup
Volume 6, Number 3, April 1990
(ISSN 8755-2590)